

# Maryland Acts on Arthritis

Newsletter of the Maryland State Advisory Council on Arthritis & Related Diseases

May 2017 | Volume 2



**Welcome** to the second issue of the Maryland State Advisory Council on Arthritis and Related Diseases Newsletter!

The month of May is Arthritis Awareness Month. Arthritis is a common, disabling condition that affects 1 in 4 Americans. In this edition of our Newsletter, you will find a powerful, inspiring story of a Maryland citizen living well with arthritis. We have also included resources for local arthritis self-management and educational programs. Celebrate Arthritis Awareness Month by participating in outstanding community events!

Wishing you good health,

Maryland State Advisory Council on Arthritis and Related Diseases: Chair, Rebecca Manno, MD, MHS; Domenic Borro, LNHA, PT; Meg Gwaltney, Matthew Jackson, Jody Marshall, Erin Penniston, MSW; Julie Toms Poludniak, MD, MPH, FAAFP; Linnette Rivera, LCPC, NCC, ACS; Bernadette Siaton, MD; Chanel Whittaker, PharmD, BCPS, CGP, FASCP, Liz Woodward, Staff: Berit Dockter MPP, RD, LD

## Rheumatoid Arthritis Fast Facts

\*Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is just one of more than 100 types of rheumatic conditions affecting the joints and connecting and surrounding tissues. Some types of arthritis can also affect vital organs.

\*RA affects roughly 1% of the population. Women are 2 to 3 times more likely to be affected than men.

\*Like with its influence on many other chronic conditions, smoking also can increase your chances of developing RA. If you are already diagnosed with RA, smoking can increase the severity of the disease.

\*Most people develop RA between the ages of 50 and 75, but it can also affect children and younger adults.

## Living with Arthritis



**Patient Story: Meg Gwaltney** My name is Meg Gwaltney and I'm a lifelong resident of Maryland, currently living in a suburb of Washington, D.C. In November 2016, I joined the Maryland State Advisory Council on Arthritis and Related Diseases as a patient representative. I did so because I wanted to help raise awareness of arthritis as a public health issue and to expand the available resources for patients and their families, health professionals, and community partners. I hope to contribute to activities that might improve the physical health and emotional well-being of those diagnosed with arthritis and other rheumatic diseases. I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, "RA" for short, after experiencing sudden, severe shoulder pain in 1982 when I was 29. I'd thought I had dislocated my shoulder and went to the emergency room. The doctors found nothing wrong and advised me to see a

rheumatologist. After a lot of x-rays and bloodwork, a second doctor told me I likely had RA, even though my shoulder pain had gone away and I had no other symptoms. My internist agreed. "The goal will be to keep you from having to use a wheelchair before age 60," he said. I was taken aback, but like most people in their 20s, I wasn't thinking that far ahead. I've now been living with RA for 34 years. I knew nothing about RA back then. None of my relatives or friends had it, and luckily, my twin sister had no symptoms either. During those initial years, having RA was a minor annoyance. I had some symptoms—occasional pain and swelling of my finger joints and knees and limited range of motion in my wrists—but none of these problems limited my ability to work, get a Master's degree, go out with friends, date, or enjoy life. I could no longer play sports or work out. This was disappointing. But I carried on doing most everything else as usual, including working a demanding job. I'm now a project director at a large consulting firm, and I lead evaluations and provide technical support to federally funded behavioral health programs throughout the nation. Over time, however, my RA has become more severe. I've had five surgeries,

including an ankle fusion and shoulder replacement, thankfully all with good outcomes. Knee replacement surgery is on the horizon. I also now have visible symptoms of the disease, most notably in my hands. However, for anyone

newly diagnosed with RA, this isn't inevitable. Fortunately, a variety of biologic drugs, not available when I was first diagnosed, can help delay, even prevent, physical disability. In general, I have a positive attitude about RA. I've gained an appreciation for the challenges faced by all people with disabilities, and I recognize now more than ever how important it is for everyone to have access to good health care. I also have first hand experience with the difficulties associated with RA—the surgeries, having to change medications when what you're on stops working, and the unrelenting pain. Having RA can be isolating and lonely too. Not many people understand what it is or how it affects our lives. My hope is that the scientific community and the federal government will continue to invest in research to find effective treatments for RA and other rheumatic diseases and that new discoveries will help all of us during our lifetimes. Maybe there will even be a cure.

## Upcoming Events

**May 1-7** Children's Art Show for Children's Mental Health Awareness Week, Lowe House Office Building, Annapolis, MD

**May 5** Wear Blue Day for Juvenile Arthritis Awareness

**May 16-June 30** from 10am-12:30pm. Howard County Living Well Chronic Disease Self-Management, Howard County General Hospital, Columbia, MD.

[njones@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:njones@howardcountymd.gov) ; 410-313-3506

**May 19** from 9am-2pm. Queen Anne's County 15th Annual Senior Summit, 4-H Park in Centreville, MD. Free admission.

**May 19-June 22** from 5pm-7:30pm. Charles County Living Well with Chronic Conditions, Indian Head Senior Center, Indian Head, MD. Register at 301-609-6931

**May 20** World Autoimmune Arthritis Day

**Thursdays** at 10:45am. Howard County Arthritis Foundation Low-Impact Exercise Program, Bain 50+ Center, Columbia, MD. [jdecray@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:jdecray@howardcountymd.gov); 410-313-6535

**Various locations and dates:** Prince George's County Department of Family Services Area Agency on Aging, Chronic Disease Self-Management Program. [lindans708@gmail.com](mailto:lindans708@gmail.com); 301-248-0039

**May** is also Older Americans Month, Lupus Awareness Month, and Mental Health Awareness Month!

For more events, contact Maryland Area Agencies on Aging: <https://tinyurl.com/hwcluep>

**SAVE THE DATE:** Walk Maryland Day, October 4, 2017



## Share Corner

**Please share!** A copy of this newsletter will be archived on the Maryland State Advisory Council on Arthritis and Related Diseases website (<https://tinyurl.com/jb456ao>). Please share the newsletter link on social media, your hospital or organization newsletter, or print and post at your place of work or doctor's office waiting room. The Council is requesting your feedback on this newsletter, such as suggestions for topics. We welcome you to share with us any upcoming event or article. Please email us your feedback and let us know if you have contacts who might benefit from receiving our newsletter: [dhmh.chronicdiseaseinfo@maryland.gov](mailto:dhmh.chronicdiseaseinfo@maryland.gov).



**For more information, visit:**

<https://tinyurl.com/j2sely2>

<http://www.arthritis.org/maryland/>

<http://www.physicaltherapy.org/arthritis/>

<https://tinyurl.com/zjy5ojy>

<https://tinyurl.com/h9knjnx>



Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene | 410-767-5780

[dhmh.chronicdiseaseinfo@maryland.gov](mailto:dhmh.chronicdiseaseinfo@maryland.gov) | <http://www.dhmh.md.gov>

201 W. Preston St, Suite 306 | Baltimore, MD 21201

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